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ABSTRACT

A study of one speaker's intuitions about and performance in Black English is presented with relation to Saussure's "langue-parole" dichotomy. Native speakers of a language have intuitions about the static synchronic entities although the data of their speaking is variable and panchronic. These entities are in a diglossic relationship to each other. There exist a basilect (concentration of stigmatized forms), an acrolect (the maximum occurrence of prestige variants), and the mesolect (the actual performance). To test this hypothesis, an intuitive sketch of basilectal Black English syntax is first drawn in traditional linguistic terms. Where discrepancies exist between this synchronic entity and the same person's performance, they are due to avoidance strategies through which some black speakers of English attempt to avoid the stigma attached to certain basilectal forms by replacing them with what their notion of the correct form is. These strategies are represented in the grammar as standardization rules. These rules apply to the output of the basilectal rules in direct proportion to the amount of attention the speaker is paying to his speech. (PMJ)

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THE STATUS OF NATIVE SPEAKER INTUITIONS IN A POLYLECTAL GRAMMAR

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Throughout the history of linguistics, various points of view have prevailed as to how one goes about writing a grammar, and what the grammar is supposed to represent. Traditional grammars purport to represent the norms of correct usage upheld by educated and upper class speakers. The technique of introspection is employed by traditional grammarians skilled at parsing sentences of their native language into their component parts and neatly displaying the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships with textbook precision. For Saussure, a grammar represents langue, a static and homogeneous set of signs, shared by the community of speakers of the language. Langue is supraindividual in nature and only imperfectly realized in the speaking or parole of individuals. To the structuralist, a grammar is the artifice of the linguist who extracts the structural elements of the language from a corpus of primary linguistic data through the application of rigorous "discovery procedures." For Chomsky and his followers, however, it doesn't matter what "discovery procedures" are employed. The only thing that matters is whether or not the rules of the grammar will generate sentences which are acceptable to mature native speakers. A transformational grammar is supposed to represent the internalized competence of an ideal speaker of the language which is said to be reflected indirectly and imperfectly in performance. Labov and his disciples have recently criticized the lack of accountability inherent in the traditional separation of langue or competence from parole or speaking. The linguist working within such a framework cannot be held strictly accountable for discrepancies between the predictions of his grammar and the way people actually speak. He can always claim that the discrepant data represent mistakes or dialect differences. For Labov, an adequate grammar should represent a set of linguistic variables which reflect the heterogeneity of real speaking. Such a grammar includes rules which apply with varying frequencies on the basis of variably weighted conditioning factors in the linguistic and sociolinguistic environment. The identification of the conditioning factors is done by means of frequency counts of variable phenomena in empirical samples of vernacular speech.

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Polylectal grammar. The term polylectal grammar will be used loosely in this paper to include Labov's conception of a language as a system of variable rules as well as other models which treat a language as a continuum, or finely graded series of lects (Bailey 1972, 1975; Bickerton 1973: DeCamp 1971) representing successive stages in its evolution and spread. Within speech communities where two or more divergent lects of a language coexist, patterns of variation may be observed which imply a ranking of the varieties along an attitudinal continuum based upon the relative frequency of occurrence of prestige or stigmatized forms. The ideal variety representing the maximal coocurrence of prestige variants is known as the acrolect, and the opposite pole, where stigmatized forms are most heavily concentrated is known as the basilect. There is often a positive correlation between attitudinal and historical grading of linguistic variables, with archaic tending to imply high prestige and innovative tending to imply low prestige, although there are numerous exceptions. In New York City, for example, the presence of r before a consonant or word boundary marks prestige and is frequent in formal registers. In British Received Pronunciation, however, innovative forms without r carry prestige while the more archaic forms with r are stigmatized.

The area of the continuum intermediate between the basilect and acrolect is known as the mesolect. From the perspective of polylectal grammar, all languages at all stages of their histories are mesolectal, although the dominant tendency of descriptive linguistics has been to ignore the mesolect or relegate it to the neglected domain of parole or performance. Polylectal grammars represent a distinct opportunity for descriptive linguistics to finally live up to its promise of describing the way that people actually speak a language. Descriptive linguistics continues, for the present, to be dominated by a static, synchronic model, however, although, polylectal grammars have been effectively employed to describe language situations in areas like Jamaica, Guyana and Hawaii where English-based pidgins or creoles have undergone considerable decreolization or convergence toward the local variety of standard English (DeCamp 1971; Bickerton 1973; Day 1974). The varieties of English spoken by black Americans have also been subjected to polylectal analysis, and massive amounts of empirical data have been collected and analysed. The main syntactic, phonological and lexical features of Black

English (BE) have been well documented although varying opinions prevail as to the nature of the phenomena underlying the data. Such opinions make claims not only about the underlying rules of BE but also about its relationship to other varieties of American English.

This writer is a black American who has spent most of his life immersed in what Labov calls the Black English Vernacular (1972 b). The language situation in black America, as the author sees it, may be grossly characterized as a situation of diglossia involving Standard English and Black English, although a more accurate model would be a post-creole continuum. The BE basilect (BBE) is much closer to acrolectal American English, however, than basilectal Jamaican English is to standard Jamaican English.

The author has very clear intuitions about the grammatical structure of BBE although he never consistently speaks it (nor do any other real black Americans). To account for mesolectal forms found in empirical data the grammar not only generates basilectal forms, but also includes rules which variably operate upon stigmatized basilectal forms and replace them with acrolectal equivalents. Such a grammar is polylectal in the sense that it describes a continuum rather than a single point in linguistic time, although it was developed through the seemingly unempirical "discovery procedure" of introspection characteristic of traditional and transformational grammars. Having its origin in the intuitions of a single native speaker, how can such a grammar fulfill Labov's principle of accountability, and how accurately can the intuitions of an individual speaker reflect the phylogenic, or supra-individual linguistic system that a polylectal grammar purports to represent?

In the following pages it is argued that native speakers of a language have intuitions about static synchronic entities although the data of their speaking is variable and panchronic. In the case of post-creole continua, the intuitions are of two discrete static synchronic entities in a diglossic relationship to one another; a basilect and an acrolect. To adequately fulfill Labov's principle of accountability, it doesn't seem to matter how one goes about writing a grammar as long as the rules accurately predict mesolectal variation as well as the static synchronic polar lects of the continuum. A brief sketch of BBE syntax based upon the authors native speaker intuitions is presented in the following section. Certain discrepancies between the ideal basilectal forms and frequently observed mesolectal forms are then accounted for by "standardization" rules which predict the kinds of

variation observed in existing empirical data.

A sketch of BBE syntax. The procedure utilized in this section has been to describe as accurately as possible, in traditional terms, the authors conception of some of the main syntactic features of BBE. For brevity, only simple sentences in declarative, interrogative, negative or affirmative modes are considered. Declarative sentences are considered basic, and always consist of a subject noun phrase followed by either a verb phrase construction or a predicate nominal construction.

Sentences with verb phrase constructions may be in any of the following tense/aspect categories which differ little from their acrolectal equivalects: the simple present tense, the future, and the present, past or future progressive (1-5).

1. SIMPLE PRESENT: John work in Los Angeles.
2. FUTURE: a) John will work in Los Angeles.
   b) John gon' work in Los Angeles.
3. PRESENT PROGRESSIVE: They fightin'.
4. PAST PROGRESSIVE: They was fightin'.
5. FUTURE PROGRESSIVE: They gon' be fightin'.

The basilect has a perfect construction marked by the particle done followed by either the past tense or past participle form of the verb. This construction takes the place of both the simple past and present perfect of acrolectal English. The particle done may sometimes be omitted:

6. PERFECT (with done) John done broke his leg.
7. PERFECT (without done) They gone home.

BBE also has a habitual progressive construction marked by the infinitive form of be which directly follows the subject noun phrase and contrasts with the present progressive marked by 'zero' copula:

8. HABITUAL PROGRESSIVE: They be fightin' all the time.
9. PRESENT PROGRESSIVE: They fightin' right now.

There is also a habitual perfect which contrasts with the done perfect:

10. HABITUAL PERFECT: He always be done lost his cool.
11. PERFECT: He done lost his cool again.

A future perfect is also possible as in:

12. FUTURE PERFECT: I'm 'on' be done went upside yo head.

Negation. Sentences in the simple present, habitual progressive or habitual perfect are negated by placing don' before the verb phrase:

13. John don' live there no mo'.
14. They don' be fightin' all the time.
15. They don' be done started they routine.

Modal like will and kin have their negative equivalents won' and kain':

16. This kain' be happenin' to me!
17. It won' happen no mo'.

Present progressive, perfect and futures with gon' are negated by placing ain' before the verb phrase:

18. He ain' jivin'.
19. I ain' gon' study wa' no mo'.
20. You ain' seen nothin'.

Negative concord. So-called double negatives are acceptable in basilectal BE as sentences 13, 17, 19 and 20 above illustrate.

Copula constrctions. Predicate noun phrase, adjectives and locatives directly follow the subject noun phrase in present tense declarative sentences:

21. She nice.
22. We on tape.

Predicate nominals follow was in the past tense and the infinitive be after modals:

23. We was ten minutes late.
24. It's gon' be fo' mo' years of hard times.

The infinite be in copula constructions may also directly follow the subject and marks habitual aspect:

25. He be red as a beet.

Present tense zero-copula forms are negated with ain' preceeding the predicate while past forms have wa'n't in the place of was. Habitual predicates are

negated by placing don' before the infinitive be.

26. He ain' no fool.
27. It wa'n't nobody there.
28. It don' be all that bad.

Yes/no questions. Yes/no questions are formed by placing do before the subject noun phrase of sentences in the simple present or habitual form, and is or was before other types of sentences:

29. Do dey be takin' care a bidness?
30. Do yo daddy live in San Francisco?
31. Is you done lost yo mind?
32. Is fat meat greasy?

Affirmative sentences. Sentences in the affirmative mode are formed by placing dó before verb phrases in simple present or habitual form and before habitual predicates. A stressed variant of the auxiliary or copula is is used before other verb phrases and predicates.

33. He dó work for Mac Donalds.
34. This nigga ís done gone crazy.
35. She ís nice.

Modal auxiliaries and the past tense marker was receive emphatic stress in affirmative sentences:

36. She kín cook!
37. We wás studyin'!

Noun phrases. BBE noun phrases differ little from their acrolectal equivalents. Some of the main differences are: marked second person plural pronoun, y'all, they as a posessive, invariant use of a as indefinite article, zero noun plurals after quantifiers, and nem used as a pluralizer of proper nouns:

38. Y'all crazy.
39. They daddy a preacher.
40. I ate a apple an' a orange.
41. That'a be five dollar.
42. Willie nem done went home.

Standardization rules. Empirical samples of mesolectal performance contain numerous discrepancies with the predicted patterns of a static synchronic grammar of the kind partially sketched above. In this section it

is suggested that many, if not all, such discrepancies may be accounted for by assuming that black speakers develop strategies for avoiding the stigma attached to certain basilectal forms by replacing them with their notion of what the correct form should be. Such strategies are represented in the grammar as standardization rules which apply variably to the output of the basilectal rules in direct porportion to the amount of attention he is paying to his speech. Labov has suggested on several occasions that such a principle of "least attention" operates in the production of vernacular speech (1972 a, 1972 b.). One example of a standardization rule accounts for the variation between forms like 43 and 44 often observed in empirical speech

43. They ain' jivin'.
44. They not jivin'.

The speaker who produces 44 is assumed to have applied a rule of the form 45 to a base structure like 43:

45. ain' → not

The same kind of rule accurately predicts the empirically observed variation among full, reduced and zero forms of the auxiliary/copula is (Labov 1969). Labov accounts for such variation by assuming that all speakers of American English, black and white, use the same set of rules which sometimes contract full forms and sometimes go on to delete the remaining consonantal segment of the reduced form. The present model assumes that for black speakers, at least, the rule operates in the opposite direction variably adding the prestige marker /z/ to the end of subject noun phrases to avoid the stigma of basilectal zero-copula forms. Recently on national television one of Amy Carter's black schoolmates, expressing her opinion of the President's daughter to a newsman said: "She nice," and then corrected herself. "She's nice." The speaker seemed to be applying precisely the kind of standardization rule just proposed. Labov's contraction/deletion analysis would require two operations to derive the unmonitored basilectal form, and only one to derive the monitored 'correct' form.

The proposed standardization rule accounts for one piece of data in Labov's study of variation in the copula (1969) more adequately than his contraction/deletion hypothesis. The data in question shows reduced forms of is occurring most frequently after vowels, while zero forms occur most frequently after voiceless

consonants. If contraction is favored by a preceeding vowel, and deletion is an extension of contraction, then deletion should also be favored by a preceeding vowel. The standardization rule adds a voiced alveolar sibilant to the end of noun phrases. Labov's data supports the hypothesis that such a rule operates upon zero-copula BBE structures, most frequently after vowels, and least frequently after voiceless consonants.

Conclusion. The age-old paradox which led Saussure to formulate the langue-parole dichotomy has been replicated in this study. The fact that a native speaker of Black English has intuitions of two coexisting static, synchronic systems must be reconciled with the fact that empirical studies repeatedly show continuous and patterned variation in primary linguistic data. Similar observations have been made by other linguists who are native speakers of "post-creole" varieties of language. Beryl Bailey, a native speaker of Jamaican creole insists upon analyzing the Jamaican situation in terms of two separate, discrete poles, a creole and a standard, rather than in terms of the continuum found in empirical data. Her Jamaican Creole Syntax: a transformational approach (1966) provides a static, synchronic description of the creole basilect which, admittedly, neither she, nor any other Jamaican consistently speaks. Her native speaker intuitions, however, are sufficiently clear to provide a very detailed and organized account of the basilectal structure. Stanley Tsuzaki (1971) a native Hawaiian, finds that despite the continuous nature of the variation in his Hawaiian English data, his native intuitions show three distinct synchronic systems representing a pidgin, a creole and a non-standard dialect of English which coexist in the linguistic repertoire of the speech community.

In the light of observations like the above, it seems clear that despite the variable and continuous nature of primary linguistic data, the reality in the head of the speaker of a language is static and synchronic in nature. Any complete theory of language should account for this fact by giving some logical status to the intuitions of native speakers by specifying what they represent. For the author of this paper, the static, synchronic entities of the native speaker's intuitions represent neither langue nor competence, which suffer equally from the ultimate lack of accountability to empirical data, but rather the polar lects of a dynamic continuum. Given an adequate characterization of the polar lects of a language (which are not subject to direct empirical

falsification) it is possible to propose rules which operate upon the output of basilectal or acrolectal grammars to produce the various mesolectal combinations found in empirical data. A theory of a language which generates empirically falsifiable hypotheses fulfills the accountability criterion even though the hypotheses are frequently proven wrong. It is only when hypotheses are not subject to falsification by empirical means that charges of unaccountability are justified.

There is a great and continuing need for reliable information about the grammatical structure of many of the vernacular languages of the world. In recent years, millions of dollars have been spent on studies of vernacular Black English, and massive amounts of data have been compiled. While such studies have contributed greatly to the development of more enlightened attitudes toward the vernacular among educators and policy makers, only fragmentary accounts of isolated features of BE grammar have been produced. This is not surprising in view of the fact that neither structuralism with all its insistence upon rigorous "discovery procedures" nor transformationalism with its heavy emphasis upon abstract formalism have been very successful in producing a complete and comprehensive description of any language. The best comprehensive descriptions of languages continue to be traditional grammars.

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